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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a program to develop a comprehensive overall strategy of educational research that deals with the state of education in Israel. Four dimensions or sets of demands on the schools are discussed: (1) civilizational demands of transmission of heritage and culture; (2) social demands for good citizenship, productive workers, up to date skills, and perpetuation of civil society; (3) parental demands for the ability to make a living, perpetuation of their way of life, and happiness; and (4) individual student demands for happiness, self expression, and the ability to make a living and fit in. All these demands find expression in the educational system through the mediation of the professional educators responsible for the day to day working of the system: classroom teachers, principals, and senior professionals. Israel's education system is ranked as nursery, elementary, secondary schools, and terciary (or university, teachers, state religious, independent, and vocational colleges). While in terms of variety of options Israel's education system ranks very high, there is considerable dissatisfaction with the system as it is operating. That dissatisfaction has expressed itself in connection with a number of critical issues. They include the problems of a common core curriculum that will unite the various ideological trends and subtrends, how minorities are treated within the system, the problem of the gap between disadvantaged or culturally deprived children and those who are not, problems of equalization, questions of what is taught and how effectively it is learned, and to what extent supplementary education is needed. (DK)

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AN INTRODUCTION TO A STUDY PROGRAM

Daniel J. Elazar

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ISRAEL'S EDUCATION SYSTEM: AN INTRODUCTION TO A STUDY PROGRAM

Daniel J. Elazar

The two most critical issues in any polity are defense and education, both of which address the perpetuation of the life of the polity and its citizens. Defense has to do with shared survival; education, not only with the survival of the polity from generation to generation but with the quality of life within in. Hence, the issue of how a polity educates its population, especially its young, is a perennial one on the public agenda. This is particularly true in democratic republics, where the tasks of education are in the hands of the public or at the very least subject to intense public scrutiny.

The education system developed by the Zionist movement and subsequently, the State of Israel, has been in many respects, a spectacular success. In pre-state days it succeeded in reviving the Hebrew language and making it the language of the country to the point where many Israelis today are so rooted in Hebrew that they have difficulties in learning a second language. It fostered the visions and values of Zionism in their various formulations and created younger generations willing to make great sacrifices to achieve the Zionist dream.

After the establishment of the state, it helped absorb several million new immigrants, to teach them the language and the ways of their new home, and make them productive and participating citizens in the civil society with a high sense of civic responsibility. It has consistently managed to raise the number of years of schooling until by now most young people pass through some form of secondary education and an ever higher percentage go on to university. Not only that, but relative to most of the world it has maintained high expectations with regard to what is learned and at least the good students come out very knowledgeable by world standards.

However, like every human endeavor, it has its flaws, and today there are many voices challenging its current effectiveness. Thus, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to improve what needs to be improved and adapt what is successful to changing conditions.

There is already a considerable body of research on aspects of Israel's educational system, but as in most similar cases, it is scattered over many topics with little effort at developing a comprehensive approach, and it tends to follow fads, because funding is available. Thus, in a computer register of approximately 1,000 studies, well over a quarter deal with the education of disadvantaged children, while there is no research on the impact of changing entrance tests on entry to the university or education for economic progress and almost nothing on such burning current subjects as the long school day or the shorter work week. Consequently, a continuing program designed to develop a comprehensive overall strategy of educational research is much needed. That is the kind of program that we are seeking to develop.

1. Four Dimensions/Sets of Demands on the Schools

The treatment of the educational issue is not an easy one, in part because every educational system must respond to four sets of demands whose importance is given different weight by different segments of the body politic. The four sets of demands are civilizational, social, parental, and individual student. Each is represented by a specific referent. The basic demands of each can be presented as follows:

Civilizational Demands	Social Demands	Parental Demands	Individual Student Demands
transmission of heritage	good citizenship	able to make a living	happiness
transmission of culture	productive worker	perpetuate way of life	self-expression
	up-to-date skills	happiness	able to make a living
	perpetuate civil society		able to fit in

1.1 Civilizational Demands/Tasks

The first task of any educational system is to transmit the heritage of the civilization it serves. This is true whether we are speaking of the transmission of the heritage of Western civilization in the schools of the United States or of Islamic civilization in the schools of Iran. This includes the transmission of the overall culture of the civilization and what are believed to be the treasures of its heritage.

1.2 Social Demands/Tasks

The social dimension of education has to do with the perpetuation of the civil society. It involves education for good citizenship, education to develop productive workers for the society with up-to-date skills, and education for social control.

1.3 Parental Demands/Tasks

The third dimension is the parental, that is to say, education in response to parental demands and expectations for their children. For example, parents want the educational system to teach their children to be able to make a living. They want the educational system to help them perpetuate their way of life and, at least in some vague way, they want the educational system to help their children in the pursuit of happiness.

1.4 Individual Student Demands/Tasks

Finally, there is the individual dimension, what the individual students expect from the educational system. Students seek happiness, both in the immediate sense of a sufficient happiness within the school system and assistance in the pursuit of happiness beyond their formal education. Students also seek self-expression, an individual goal which is now widely accepted by the society. Finally, students seek education for adjustment or the ability to fit in.

Every educational system must respond in some measure to all of these demands, but the ordering and emphasis is different from civil society to civil society. In their earliest days, for example, the Jewish schools of Eretz Israel emphasized the civilizational and social demands, particularly in their religious or ideological forms, and concerned themselves with the parental and individual demands only to the extent that they coincided with the first two. Over time, the social and parental demands grew at the expense of the civilizational, transmitting the heritage became less important than learning how to be good citizens and make a living.

In some quarters, there are efforts underway to radically shift the emphasis in education to the individual student. As American progressive educators used to say, "We teach children, not subjects." Individual happiness and self-expression are given more importance as goals of the educational system. The parental dimension is important insofar as it conforms to the emphasis on the individual. If this were to happen, the social and civilizational goals would be reduced in importance, almost by definition. In other quarters, the reverse trend is evident -- a greater desire to return to the pattern of earlier times, to emphasize the religious and ideological dimensions of education. Most recently, the "parental choice" movement has, perforce, emphasized parental goals in the education of their children. Through all of this runs the great question of how will the schools accomplish the more technical tasks of teaching literacy and numeracy -- the basic skills that all students are expected to acquire in their years of schooling.

1.5 Educators and Others as Mediating Forces

All the foregoing demands find expression in the educational system through the mediation of the professional educators responsible for the day-to-day working of the system, ranging from classroom teachers to principals to the system's most senior professionals. In every age, teachers have been critical and active mediating elements between educational goals and those being taught. But since the rise of education as a profession, the role of teachers and other educators has grown exponentially. In some respects educators' goals also are derived from the foregoing four-fold division. Normally their priorities are expected to be the same as those who employ them, but even in such cases they have much discretion in matters of "what" and "how", that is to say, subject matter and methodology. In some cases, professional educators, firmly convinced that they know better, have a different set of priorities from those who employ them, and, in a sense seek to reeducate their employers as well as to educate their students in their way.

While educators are the principal mediating factors in the foregoing model, there are others as well: ministries or departments of education and their political leadership, school boards where they exist, ideological and religious movements that seek to impose their will on the schools, and perhaps others are of varying importance as mediating factors, depending on their influence within the overall system.

2. Israel's Education System

In fact, Israel's varied school system offers a very wide range of possibilities, a publicly supported response to the problems of parental choice that seeks to serve Jewish and some civilizational goals and Israel's societal goals as well. A preliminary classification of the present situation looks something like this:

2.1 Nursery Schools

2.2 Elementary Schools

	Priorities in Rank Order (estimated)
State	S,C,P,I
- Tali	P,S,C,I
- Labour	P,S,C,I
- Open	I,P,S,C
- Kibbutz	C,S,I,P
- Community	S,P,C,I
State Religious	C,S,P,I
- Torah	C,P,S,I
- Kibbutz	C,S,I,P
State Arabic	C,P,S,I
- Druse	C,S,P,I
- Circassian	C,P,S,I
Independent	C,P,S,I
- Talmud Torah	C,P,S,I
Private	C,P,I,S

2.3 Secondary Schools

State	I,S,P,C
- Tali	
- Vocational	
- Kibbutz	
- Military	S,C,I,P
- Arts and Sciences	I,P,S,C
State Religious	
- Yeshivot	C,P,S,I
- Kibbutz	
State Arabic	
- Independent	C,P,S,I
- High Schools	C,S,P,I
- Private	

2.4 Terciary

Universities
- Bar Ilan (1)
- Ben Gurion (2)
- Haifa (3)
- Hebrew University of Jerusalem (4)
- Open University (5)
- Technion (6)
- Tel Aviv (7)
- Weitzman Institute (8)

Teachers College
State
- Labour

State Religious
State Arabic

Independent (?)

Vocational Colleges
State
State Arabic
Independent

3. Critical Issues

While in terms of variety of options Israel's education system ranks very high, there is considerable dissatisfaction with the system as it is operating. That dissatisfaction has expressed itself in connection with a number of critical issues. They include the problem of a common core curriculum that will unite the various ideological trends and subtrends, how minorities are treated within the system, the problem of the gap between disadvantaged or culturally deprived children and those who are not, and with that gap the problems of equalization, questions of what the children are taught in school and how effectively do they learn it, and to what extent do they need supplementary education including grey education and the very extensive use of tutors. There are questions about the curriculum and questions about the textbooks that are used. They can be listed as follows:

3.1 Ideological Trends and Common Curriculum

3.2 Minorities

3.3 "The Gap" - Disadvantaged Children
Problems of Equalization

3.4 What do the students learn?

3.5 How effectively?

3.6 Forms of supplementary education:
- Parents and School
- Municipal and other Recognized Bodies
- "Grey" Education and Tutors

3.7 Curriculum

3.8 Textbooks

4. What Should We Study First?: The System and its Subsystems

All the foregoing need to be considered as targets of any comprehensive study. After consultation with leading experts in the field, including Professor James Coleman of the University of Chicago, who headed the last major comprehensive study of Israel's education system, Professor Lee Shulman of Stanford University, who was part of the Coleman Project, Professor Ozer Schild of Haifa University, Professor Chaim Adler of the Hebrew University, Professors Moshe Chen and Rina Shapiro of Tel Aviv University, Professor Walter Ackerman of Ben-Gurion University, Dr. Haim Gaziel of Bar-Ilan University, and others, our first recommendation is to conduct a comprehensive study of the structure of Israeli education, which is necessary to provide a base for all other studies, since every school system or subsystem has its own special characteristics and orientation. We propose doing this for elementary and secondary schools and for the teachers colleges and teacher education programs at the universities.

In this study we will be looking at such questions as the impact of the multiple school systems on: 1) parent and student satisfaction; 2) the achievement of civilizational, national and societal goals; 3) pluralism and tolerance; 4) the existence or lack of a core or common curriculum.

There have been no such studies except in connection with the educational reform of the 1960's establishing intermediate schools for the purpose of better integration of disadvantaged children. In our opinion this project must take precedence over all others. Beyond it, we would propose the following:

5. Other Issues to be Studied

5.1 School Finance: Ministry of Education Budget and how it is allocated. Supplementary funding: source and impact.

5.2 Trace mobility patterns to measure school as equalizer.

5.3 Limits on access of certain classes of students to university.

- High School placement
- Psychometric exam
- High School offerings
- Other

5.4 Role of Tzahal (Israel Defense Force) and its effect

5.5. Dropout rate in schools - what, when, why, where

5.6 Success or failure of integration efforts

5.7 Teachers - who are they?
- their level?
- how well do they teach?

5.8 Teaching of selected subjects

5.9 Teacher recruitment
- who?
- how?

5.10 Teacher training
- who does it?
- where?
- what do they learn?

5.11 Is there any common culture shared with non-Jewish minorities?

5.12 State of education for economic progress
- technical
- commercial
- business
- liberal

5.13 The role and utility of residential education

5.14 School governance
- role of principal
- role of parents
- role of teachers
- role of students
- role of state
- role of municipality
- role of donors

5.15 Grey education

5.16 Changes in educational time frames and their likely impact
- 5 day week
- long school day

Of these 15 projects, we would recommend the following four as of highest priority.

5.3 Limits on Access of Certain Classes of Students to University

The problems of lower quality schooling in the development towns and moshavim which are overwhelmingly Afro-Asian in population background always posed a problem of children from those areas being improperly prepared for the matriculation exams which are prerequisite for Israelis to be admitted to the university. More recently, the situation has become even more difficult through the introduction of a psychometric test (similar to the SAT) required of all applicants to Israel's universities, whose results determine whether a candidate is even considered for entry. Not only does this psychometric test require relatively high levels of knowledge, but there are some indications that it is culturally biased and thus underestimates the capacity of those people who did not grow up in homes oriented toward European or American culture.

This issue is a critical one for Israel's future both in terms of exploiting the full potential of its population and in preventing greater cleavages between segments of Israel's population. It becomes of additional critical importance with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of olim from the Soviet Union, most of whom are college educated and whose children will undoubtedly be on the same track. They are also likely to be placed ahead of the underprivileged segment of the Sephardic population, thereby pushing the latter even further down the ladder of success, making a study like this which can be applied to correct the situation even more imperative. There is no record of any research on this topic to date.

5.11 Is There Any Common Culture Shared With Non-Jewish Minorities?

Israel has actively fostered schools for non-Jewish minorities in which they could learn and teach in their own language and culture. While not formally designated as cultural minority rights, in effect the schools provide just that and have done so successfully while at the same time teaching Hebrew and a certain basic Israeli curriculum. What is not clear is whether the schools have helped foster a common culture shared by Jews and non-Jews -- the kind of cultural basis that is necessary for a successful political and civic integration in a multi-ethnic state. Given the new self-consciousness of Israeli Arabs and their new assertiveness, this is a critical question for Israel as a whole and as such falls heavily on Israel's schools system.

5.12 The State of Education for Economic Progress

Israel must undergo an economic reordering in order to resume the economic growth that came to an end nearly twenty years ago. In the interim, the continued collapse of Israel's old economy is creating a high percentage of structurally unemployed, most of whom are not trained to do the kind of work that is needed in a contemporary economy. It may very well be that many young people passing through the formal education system will end up in the same situation. Thus it is important to study this problem and to see what can be done to prepare the population of Israel for the new economy. This issue is accentuated by the necessity to absorb the mass immigration from the USSR, including the reeducation of adults and the education of their children. We have not discovered any research on this topic.

5.16 Changes in Educational Time Frames: Their Likely Impact

Two major proposals have been placed on the table in Israel: one, to reduce the school week from six days to five in line with the general readjustment of Israel's economy to a five-day week; the second, to extend the school day from its present four or five hours per day to seven or eight in order to provide greater enrichment, especially for children in deprived areas. Both of these changes are problematic. In the case of the first, the problem is social. In a society where most women work, school serves as a babysitter for children and is particularly effective because many women work only half days (a possibility in the Israeli economy which has long since developed a system of flexible hours). The second is far more problematic since a long school day requires considerable funding which does not seem to be presently available, more teachers to teach the longer hours, and appropriate curricula.

Formally, the Israeli ministry of education has decided to extend the long school day but has postponed implementation for budgetary and personnel reasons. In fact what has happened is that recent budget cuts have reduced the length of the school day. However, through supplementary funding, the long school day is being tried in several development towns where it can be monitored and studied. Since these are two problems of immediate concern to Israel, we suggest that they be given high priority.

We have found only two studies of experiment with a longer school day and none on the impact of a shorter school week. We have put a high priority emphasis on these immediate issues as ones where a research project could have immediate impact.

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